

Email: 7/15/2013  
Dave Jones - Sherry Hocking

Hi,

Like anything, it was an evolution.

It started on the Cromemco Z-2 computer. We had a video frame buffer from a company in California. I don't remember if it was the company or the model, but we called it the Cat buffer. We also had the Dazzler display card, which was much lower resolution and output only. The Cat buffer was good resolution. Something like 256 x 256 or 512 x 512. I think it was black and white, but might have had some kind of color output mode, but not a color input mode. I don't remember the details.

I wrote some software that would capture frames on the Cat buffer and save them to disk. I also did one that captured a frame, reduced the resolution, and saved it in memory, and then did it again, so it could capture a number of low resolution frames. Then those frames could be saved to disk and played as a sequence on the Dazzler board (in low resolution).

I don't remember if Ralph [Hocking] had the same combination of cards in his computer or not. I think he did.

At some point I wrote a program for printing the images from the Cat buffer onto a dot matrix printer. It might have been on a Computer Sunday. That's the kind of thing that we did on Computer Sundays. Probably somewhere around 1982 or 1983.

That first version was no shades of gray. Just black or white dots. As was usual for those kind of programs, it printed 8 rows of dots at once, then moved the print head by 8 dots and printed the next 8 dots. Those kind of prints usually had shading to them caused by that large of a movement so every other set of 8 rows of dots tended to be a little lighter or darker.

So I made another version that used the printer's ability to move down by a single dot so you couldn't see that big change in shading. But that also meant that 7 of the 8 dots now overlapped with the previous pass. If it only printed a single row of dots then it was going to wear out the ribbon in that one spot. By printing all rows the dots became very dark. But by printing using a worn out ribbon, ink could be built up on each dot based on how many times a given dot was struck. So that allowed dots to have no ink, or 1-8 hits worth of ink, getting 9 shades of gray (though there was a strong difference between zero hits and one hit).

Of course the program went in both the TV Center and at Ralph's.

When I got an Amiga computer, around 1986, I rewrote the program to print from the Amiga. Enough people liked the program that I then wrote it as a commercial program and gave it the name "FinePrint" (one word). I don't remember if I used that name on the earlier versions or not.

That took a while to write the commercial version, because I needed to get documentation for as many different dot matrix printers as I could so it would work with all of them. At that point I had a 24 pin dot matrix printer, and they were getting common, so I decided to make the Amiga version work with 16 hits on each pixel. Plus I added sliders to the Amiga version that allowed you to translate the shades of gray of the image into a specific

number of hits on the printer. I also added the ability to scale the image to virtually any size. Allowing prints that were 100 feet tall, if you had the time and the paper.

I first showed the commercial version of FinePrint at the Amiga Expo (Ami-Expo) in New York in 1987, along with the Jones Buffer and a film slide printer that Jim Kuzma and I had created. I put an ad in one of the Amiga magazines in early 1988 (cost me a fortune) and sold a half a dozen copies to dealers and directly to people (not enough to pay for the ad).

I took 25 copies of it to the AmiExpo in Chicago in the summer of 1988 with plans to try and sell them one at a time there. While there I met a guy who was an agent and said he could sell all 25 to a dealer in one shot. He did that in 10 minutes and I ended up signing up with him as a rep. He then got me orders from all the distributors, so I ended up selling them in batches of 50 and 100.

I think I sold about 2,000 copies of FinePrint over the next 2 years or so.

I hope that helps.

...Dave  
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Hi David -

Hope you are staying cool. Looks like its going to get frying-hell hot again. Something has come up with the book - can you give me a brief description of Fine Print - as software what did it do, what parameters you could control, why you developed it. We might include an image of Ralph's and want to credit your work correctly.

Sorry for the ask and hope that you have time to do this...

S

Hi,  
I remembered a bit more.

I think when the Jones Buffer was first made we hooked it up to the Z-2 computer. At first I don't think the BIO cards were finished, or at least I don't think there was software on the Z-2 to support it, so it didn't have the ability to save images. I made an Amiga interface for my Amiga and at that point everybody wanted to switch to the Amiga.

I think at that point the TV Center bought an Amiga, and at around that time I repackaged the Center's buffer into the box I was using for the ones I was building. Though that might have happened a bit later. At that time we also added more frames and the BIO boards. So with the Amiga we could save frames.

At around that same time I made the first Amiga version of the printing software. I think Connie [Coleman] pushed me to do it. She was a big fan of the original Z-2 version. That initial Amiga version went in at the TV Center, and was what I showed at Ami-Expo. The final version was maybe 6 months later.

It's a bit fuzzy, but I think that's pretty close to reality.

...Dave